

RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL

No. 119

Approved March 28, 1996

RESOLVED, That a Comprehensive After School Program be created in collaboration with the Providence Public Schools, Providence Recreation Department, Providence Police Department and along with various Neighborhood Social Service Agencies.

IN CITY COUNCIL
MAR 21 1996

READ AND PASSED

Epichon V. Fargnoli
ACTING PRES.

Michael L. Clement
CLERK

APPROVED

MAR 28 1996

Vincent A. Cianci
MAYOR

General John and General Taylor

BOSTON GLOBE FEB 96

Trouble after school

(First of three parts)

A generation ago, the ring of the school bell ending the day's classes sent teen-agers in two directions. Many went to the school's gym or athletic

Teen-age Wasteland

field, to the music room or the auditorium, to the places where myriad clubs and other after-school groups met. For others who went home, Mom was usually on

hand to provide a snack or at least take notice of youthful activities.

Now the after-school hours have become a wasteland, a barren desert of numbing television and alienation for many young people and for others a breeding ground of crime and gangs and teen pregnancy.

The problem has not drawn nearly the attention it deserves, partly because it has grown gradually, the result of no single event but of several significant social trends conspiring together.

Most important is the dramatic increase in two-worker families. Combined with the rise in single-parent households — also steep — this means that many more homes are empty of adults until 5 or 6 o'clock every week night. US Census studies indicate that 57 percent of children under 18 lack full-time parental supervision, compared with only 37 percent in 1970.

And during the years when parents were increasingly leaving their homes unattended in the afternoons, local governments across the country were cutting back after-school programs of all kinds, often padlocking the buildings at 1:30 or 2.

In what history may judge one of the most perverse trends of modern life, millions of youths are being tossed out into totally unstructured situations with no adult supervision for three or four or five hours a day, every day.

At precisely the age when young people continually test limits to find what behavior is acceptable by adult standards, they find there are none. The result is that teens by the thousands take up activities that would violate any standard, threatening nothing less than a national calamity.

The explosion in unmarried teen pregnancy certainly qualifies. While a leveling off has been discerned in recent years, the rates of teen-age sexual activity and teen-age pregnancy are epidemic, and the afternoon wasteland is a big factor. The Carnegie Task Force on Youth Development found that "unsupervised after school hours" are "the most common time for adolescent sexual intercourse (usually at the boy's home while his parents are at work)." The task force quoted a pregnant 15-year-old: "After school, I used to go to Joe's house 'cause his parents weren't there. At first we just watched TV and made out, but that turned into sex before I even thought about saying no." Sex occurs not only in a hideaway late at night after a six-pack of beer but where opportunity is even more inviting: at home, after school, before parents are due back from work. The old expression "idle hands breed mischief" now has a discouraging corollary: "Idle hands breed."

There are painful anecdotes about crime, too. Just last week a 13-year-old Raynham boy was charged with raping a 13-year-old Raynham girl — after school, at home. But crime statistics go beyond the anecdotal. From 1988 to 1993, an alarming surge in violent crime by youths aged 14 to 17 catapulted this group ahead of the 18- to 24-year-olds as the nation's most violent. And a South Carolina study showed a dramatic upsurge of crime in the wasteland hours. While the number of violent crimes committed by adults rose steadily

into the evening, peaking just before midnight, youth crime spiked upward at 3 p.m. and stayed relatively high until 7 before trailing off.

Youth crimes are not just minor assaults. According to Dean James Alan Fox of Northeastern's College of Criminal Justice, studies indicate that the number of homicides committed by 14- to 17-year-olds exceeded 4,000 in 1993. Fox attributes a big part of the problem to lack of supervision: "They have too much time to kill."

There is simply no doubting that the unsupervised hours of the teen-age wasteland are damaging America's next generation, and there is little reason to hope the trends will improve. The number of single-parent and two-worker households is still on the increase, and tight local budgets continue to squeeze extracurricular activities at schools across the country.

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OF THREE PARTS SERIES

American children receive an abundance of attention rhetorically, but the focus is usually on younger children. Most of the social science studies, most of the programs and most of the resources are aimed at preteens. Hillary Clinton's best-seller "It Takes a Village" is illustrative: though wide-ranging, it concentrates on younger children.

The budget cuts sought by congressional Republicans would affect nearly all children, but they include programs designed specifically to subsidize after-school activities.

Some of the federal programs are funded through the Education Department, but many are administered by the Justice Department as part of the 1994 crime bill. Of these, midnight basketball received the most publicity, but Attorney General Janet Reno also stresses the importance of programs in the afternoon, when "our children are in isolation - basically unsupervised." She counts community policing as contributing to a solution, since cops on the street come to know individual teen-agers.

COMMUNITY POLICE →

Many state and local governments and neighborhood groups are heavily involved in trying to provide after-school activities, but the demand typically far outstrips meager resources.

Worse yet is the approaching demographic bulge: There are now 39 million children under age 10; by the year 2005, the number of teen-agers 14 to 17 years old will increase by 23 percent. Some policy makers are aware of these numbers: Sen. Bob Dole commiserated with governors last week about "the coming juvenile crime storm." A response centered on tougher sentences and prison construction, however, is an admission of defeat - a premature surrender. Now is the time for policies aimed at minimizing the storm, not cleaning up after it.

To recognize the perils threatened by the teen-age wasteland is not to assume that all children growing into adolescence are condemned to lives of depredation; many will simply be dulled by television, and many will thrive. And it doesn't remove the individual responsibility of the youths themselves and their parents. But the trends are frightening.

Officials from Mayor Thomas M. Menino to President Clinton to a number of the Republican presidential candidates have begun to hear the warnings and point to the after-school hours as a problem in critical need of attention. As teen-agers themselves know all too well, cultivating this wasteland will require enormous effort, an effort that begins with a recognition that parents and public officials have left teen-agers' afternoons dangerously unstructured, dangerously barren.

TOMORROW: Voices from the teen-age wasteland.

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Student suspensions rise this year

PROVIDENCE — The number of students suspended from school for assault, weapons possession or other serious offenses, has jumped by more than 40 percent in the first half of the school year, a worrisome phenomenon to school officials, even though the actual numbers are relatively small.

Last year, 45 students drew long-term suspensions for serious offenses from the time school opened through the first week of February.

PROVIDENCE

This academic year the number had reached 65 at the same point last week — a jump of 20.

"It's significant, whether you look at the number — 20 — or the percentage," said Supt. Arthur M. Zarrella.

The 65 students suspended so far this year were involved in a total of

67 incidents; 37 for assault, 23 for carrying weapons, and 7 for other offenses, including one in which a girl stole a credit card from a teacher's purse at Hope High School.

"You have to be totally naive not to realize that schools are a microcosm of the community," Zarrella said, noting that police are concerned about an increase in drug-related violence and gang activity.

VINCENT A. CIANCHI, JR.
Mayor

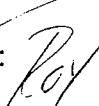
ARTHUR M. ZARRELLA, PED. D.
Superintendent

Providence
Schools
OUR SCHOOLS. OUR FUTURE.

Office of the Superintendent

April 12, 1996

Mr. Raymond Brown
Department of Recreation
109 Bucklin Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02907

Dear Mr. Brown: 

I received a copy of City Council Resolution No. 119 requesting that the School Department, Recreation Department and Police Department along with various Neighborhood Social Service Agencies collaborate in creating after school programs.

I will ask Mr. Edward Pascarella, Health/Physical Education Administrator/Supervisor to contact you in order to determine whether such a collaboration is possible.

Sincerely,



Arthur M. Zarrella, Ped.D.
Superintendent

AMZ:ecmj

CC: Mr. Michael R. Clement ✓
Mr. Edward Pascarella